

disgust and dismay with our Nation's policy in Iraq. And I want to thank Bart Aceocella, who has helped me with my many, many words calling on the President of the United States to bring our troops home.

Forty-nine months after this failed Iraq policy was launched, we are still being told, Be patient. Progress is just around the corner. All of our sacrifices will somehow be worth it. But all that amounts to nothing more than desperate spin. And the American people aren't buying it; neither, apparently, are some top military brass. The administration can't find someone to take the job of war czar, a job that would coordinate the military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the recruits for the job, retired Marine General Jack Sheehan, told The Washington Post last week that he would rather spare himself the ulcer, saying of the Bush administration, "The very fundamental issue is they don't know where the hell they're going."

How can the administration possibly say that Iraq is on the road to freedom and stability when a bomb goes off inside the Green Zone and kills members of the elected Parliament? If it's not safe inside the fortress of the Green Zone, just imagine what it is like in the streets of Baghdad.

How can the administration say progress is being made when the Associated Press reports that dozens of Iraqi police officers were demonstrating outside their Baghdad station chanting, "No, no to America. Get out, occupiers." And now American soldiers can look forward to a few more months of trying valiantly, but in vain, to carry out this misguided mission, as the Pentagon has announced that soldiers' 1-year tours will be extended to 15 months.

I ask my colleagues who gave the President the authority to invade Iraq 4½ years ago if they weren't surprised that they voted for an occupation with no apparent end in sight. They absolutely didn't intend for our troops to be caught in the middle of a civil war that our very presence as occupiers has inspired. Four and a half years later, over 3,300 Americans who will never make it home to their families, and all at the cost of more than \$375 billion to stop Saddam Hussein from using weapons of mass destruction that he didn't have.

This week, Americans sent their 2006 tax returns to the IRS, trusting that our government will send that money back to us in the form of services, benefits, stability and security. So what do we tell them? What do we tell the American people about the staggering costs they are being asked to assume for the occupation of Iraq? Can anyone possibly argue that we have somehow gotten a return on this reckless investment?

The National Priorities Project has broken down the Iraq financial burden, assuming a total of \$456 billion once the latest supplemental is signed by

the President. Here is what it boils down to: \$4,100 for every American household; \$1,500 for every man, woman and child; \$275 million a day; \$11 million every hour. Look what we could do with that kind of money: \$928 million, 3 days in Iraq is enough to build 100 schools or 5,400 affordable housing units, or provide health care for 144,000 children for the length of the Iraq war.

And if national security is what you want to redirect the money toward, we could have used Iraq appropriations for more secure posts, for energy independence initiatives, for nuclear non-proliferation programs, for debt relief in the underprivileged areas of the world. We could have invested in real national security.

Mr. Speaker, we have sacrificed more than enough in lives, in treasure, in national stature and credibility for a mistaken ideological pipe dream.

It is time for our leaders to hear the frustration of the American people, frustration with this shameful, wasteful, futile policy. It is time to end this occupation. It is time to bring our troops home.

THE RUTGERS WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. HOLT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, the women's basketball team of Rutgers University had a great season going to the finals. And as one of two Members of Congress who represents Rutgers University here in Congress, I would like to pay tribute to them, not just for their athletic ability.

After the season was over, they were the subject of hateful, crude and insulting comments; and they responded with restraint, with eloquence and dignity. They were classy. These athletes and Coach Stringer distinguished themselves after the season even more than they did during their extraordinary season. And they serve as a reminder of what college athletics is all about, or should be. We hold up college athletics not for the entertainment of alumni and fans, but because we believe athletic participation builds character. These women of the Rutgers basketball team showed that they have character.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFazio) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFazio addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mrs. MCCarthy) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MCCarthy of New York addressed the House. Her remarks will

appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. KUCINICH addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

DEMOCRATIC BLUE DOG COALITION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise on behalf of the 43 Member strong fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition. We are a group of fiscally conservative Democrats that are committed to restoring common sense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government.

As you walk the Halls of Congress, Mr. Speaker, it is easy to know when you are walking by the office of a fellow Blue Dog Member because you will see this poster that says "The Blue Dog Coalition." It says, "Today, the U.S. national debt is, 8,887,793,986,597.86." And for every man, woman and child in America, their share of the national debt is \$29,465. It is what we refer to as the "debt tax." And that is one tax that cannot be cut, that cannot go away until this Nation gets its fiscal house in order. The Federal deficit continues to climb.

Mr. Speaker, it is hard now to think back and realize, but from 1998 through 2001, this country had a balanced budget; and yet under the Republican leadership for the previous 6 years, we have seen them rubber-stamp the President's budget year after year after year, giving us the largest deficit after the largest deficit after the largest deficit, record deficits. And as a result of that, we have seen the national debt grow to where it is today, approaching \$9 trillion.

Why does this matter? It matters because the total national debt from 1789 to 2000 was \$5.67 trillion, but by 2010, the total national debt will have increased to \$10.88 trillion. This is a doubling of the 211-year debt in just 10 years. Interest payments on this debt are one of the fastest growing parts of the Federal budget. And the debt tax is one that cannot be repealed. Deficits reduce economic growth. They burden our children and grandchildren with liabilities. They increase our reliance on foreign lenders who own some 40 percent of our debt.

This chart here, Mr. Speaker, graphically depicts why the American people should be concerned about the fact that our country is nearly \$9 trillion in debt. You see, our Nation spends a half a billion dollars a day, give or take a

few dollars, simply paying interest on the debt, and that is money that could be going for education, health care, veterans benefits, to properly equip our men and women in uniform and ensure that they've got the best body armor possible.

And this really graphically depicts it, as you can see. The red bar is the amount of money our Federal Government spends simply paying interest on the national debt. The light blue bar demonstrates how much money we spend educating our children. The green box indicates how much we spend on our veterans. And the purple box indicates how much we spend on homeland security. Again, you can see overwhelmingly our tax money is going to pay interest on the national debt.

It is time to get our fiscal house in order. It is time to restore common sense to our Federal Government. And once we do, we can begin to spend less of your hard earned tax money, Mr. Speaker, on paying interest on the national debt, and we can spend a lot more on educating our children, taking care of America's veterans, keeping our homeland secure, and the list of America's priorities goes on and on.

One of the co-chairs for the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition is Allen Boyd from Florida. He is our administrative co-chair. I am delighted that he has joined me this evening for this lively discussion about restoring common sense and fiscal discipline to our national government. And part of the way we do that, we believe, is through accountability.

Throughout the evening we are going to be talking about the budget, we are going to be talking about the debt and the deficit, we are going to be talking about accountability, not only at home, but also in Iraq, and making sure that the hardworking people of this country are getting the most for their tax dollar. I don't think that is asking too much. And I think it is very appropriate that on tax day we rise on the floor of the House to demand accountability for how the American taxpayer's money is being spent.

With that, I yield to the gentleman from Florida, Mr. BOYD, the co-chair for administration for the Blue Dog Coalition.

Mr. BOYD of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend and counterpart, Mike Ross from Arkansas, my fellow Member of the 43 Member strong fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition. It is a group that I have been a member of all the years of my service, 10 years of my service here in the United States House of Representatives, and it is a group that I am quite proud of their work on behalf of the American people.

Mr. Speaker, like yourself, being raised in Indiana and Mr. Ross in Arkansas, I was raised in a little community in north Florida on a farm by parents who taught me very early that it was important that we, as a family, live within our means. We established

our priorities as a family, the things that we had to have, needed. We knew what our sources of income were, and we worked hard as a family to meet those priorities. But Mr. Speaker, you know, we were taught as young people, as children, if you don't have the money, then you don't buy things which you can't afford to pay for. Those were lessons that we learned very well at an early age, taught by our parents, that we carried on to our businesses. And let's face it, if you spend more money every year in a business than you take in, you're out of business pretty soon; your banker pulls the plug on you.

□ 2030

We learned that lesson. Our local governments and State governments understand that, as well as our county governments. But something has happened in Washington in the last 6 years. In 8 tough years during the 1990s of making tough decisions relative to our priorities and spending and getting under control the deficit spending, 6 years ago, 6-plus years ago, we went on a rampage here in Washington that sent spending through the roof, far outstripping the revenues raised to pay for that spending. As a result, we had to go into the capital markets and borrow that money to pay for normal operations of our United States Government.

We have the most powerful government in the world. We have the most powerful Nation. We have the richest Nation. Our economic model is a wonderful, wonderful economic model. But we have forgotten the lessons that we all learned as children taught to us by our parents that we ought to be fiscally responsible and we ought to be accountable for how we spend our dollars.

This is really what my friend, Mr. Ross, who is leading this special order tonight, the point that he wants to make. That is that when we take dollars from the American public in the form of taxes, and today is the day, April 17, which happens to be—since yesterday was a holiday someplace, today is the day that our taxes are due. When we take taxes from the American people, the American people expect us to spend that money wisely and they expect us to account for them and they don't expect us to waste those dollars.

That is why some of the things that I have been seeing over the last several years in the way that some of our Federal executive agencies have spent the money and been unable to account for, and I tell you, honestly, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Defense probably is the biggest offender as it relates to accountability. Many of the dollars that we have appropriated over the years for the Iraq war, for instance, the Department of Defense cannot pass an audit or account for in how they were spent.

I think you see one of the things that is happening in the last several months since the election is that Congress is

beginning to ask the tough questions of the administration as it relates to how the tax dollars that are taken from the American people by the United States Government, how they are spent. Are we spending them wisely and are we accounting for them? Do we have contractors running amuck in Iraq, and are we getting our money's worth?

I think this is an important time to be thinking about accountability and good stewardship of our American tax dollars. Today is the day. Midnight tonight is the time when that filing is due. You know, the people at home that I live around, they don't mind paying taxes as long as they know as a government we are setting our priorities and we are doing a good job of stewardship and accounting for the dollars that are being spent. I think that is what this is all about tonight, accountability; and I want to thank my friend, Mr. Ross, for leading this discussion.

And, Mr. Speaker, it is great to see you in that chair as a fellow member of the Blue Dog Coalition.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Florida for his insight and discussing fiscal discipline and the budget and demanding that this Congress reflects the values and the priorities of the American people.

The U.S. is becoming increasingly dependent on foreign lenders. Foreign lenders currently hold a total of \$2.199 trillion of our public debt. Compare this to only \$623 billion in foreign holdings back in 1993. There is a chart here that pretty much shows us where we have been and where we are going. The amount of foreign-held debt more than doubled under the Bush administration. Starting in 2001, you can see how many billions of dollars we were borrowing from foreign central banks and foreign investors, and you can see how it has gradually increased all of the way through 2006.

Putting it another way, this President has borrowed more money in the past 6 years from foreign central banks and foreign investors than the previous 42 Presidents combined. You want to talk about a national security risk, I believe that alone is a national security risk.

We are already 60 percent dependent on foreign oil. We know that. We see it every time we fill up at the pumps. And, Mr. Speaker, if we are not careful, we are also going to become too dependent on foreign countries to fund our government.

I always enjoy David Letterman's top 10 list. I have a top 10 list. My top 10 list tonight lists the foreign countries that we have borrowed money from to help fund tax cuts in this country for people earning over \$400,000 a year. That's right, year after year, for the past 6 years, we have continued to pass tax cuts, not for working families, but for folks earning over \$400,000 a year. We didn't have a surplus, so where did the money come from? It came from our Nation borrowing to the tune of about a billion dollars a day.

And before we borrow a billion a day, we spend half a billion every day paying interest on the debt we have already got, money that could go to our veterans, to homeland security, to education, to health care. Some 10 million children in this country today are without health care. Instead, it is going to pay interest on our national debt. Where did the money come from? A lot comes from the Social Security trust fund.

The first bill I filed as a Member of Congress was a bill to tell the politicians in Washington to keep their hands off the Social Security trust fund. Republican leadership for 6 years refused to give me a hearing or a vote on that bill. Now we know why: Because they were borrowing money from the Social Security trust fund with absolutely no provision made on how the money is going to be paid back or when it is going to be paid back or where the revenues are going to come from to pay it back.

When you go to the bank to get a loan, the banker wants to know how you are going to pay it back, when you are going to pay it back, and how much you are going to pay back on a monthly schedule, and so forth and so on.

But the top 10 list, these are the countries that the United States of America has borrowed money from to fund our government in these days of reckless deficit spending:

Japan, \$637.4 billion.

China, \$346.5 billion.

The United Kingdom, \$223.5 billion.

OPEC, yes, OPEC, our Nation, the United States of America, has borrowed \$97.1 billion from OPEC.

Korea, \$67.7 billion.

Taiwan, \$63.2 billion.

The Caribbean banking centers, \$63.6 billion.

Hong Kong, \$51 billion.

Germany, \$52.1 billion.

And rounding out the top 10 countries that the United States of America has borrowed money from to fund our government, Mexico, \$38.2 billion.

It is time to restore fiscal discipline and accountability to our government. And a new member of the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition who is helping us do that in this new Democratic majority, we are demanding answers to tough questions, we are demanding commonsense be restored in our government. We are demanding that this new leadership governs from the middle, which is where we are as Blue Dogs and where we believe the majority of Americans are, and the new Blue Dog member who is helping us do that is the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WILSON), and I yield to him at this time.

Mr. WILSON of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, this is a taxing time for America. As a member of the fiscally conservative Democrat Blue Dog Coalition, I welcome these opportunities to come to the floor and talk about fiscal responsibility and what we need to draw our attention to in this Nation's most pressing problem.

Mr. Speaker, it is a skyrocketing national debt. As Congressman ROSS has pointed out and indicated in numerous

ways, it has just gotten out of hand. We are paying so much money of our tax dollars to pay the interest on the debt to foreign countries that we are borrowing from that it is really changing the face of America.

Tonight, Mr. Speaker, the timing is especially good because April 17 is the tax filing deadline for this year. As Americans, we race to the mailboxes with our taxes to meet the deadline, and it is important to note how our national debt affects each and every U.S. taxpayer. The average U.S. household devotes almost \$2,000 a year in taxes to pay interest on our national debt, \$2,000 a year just to pay the interest. That is about twice the amount they pay in taxes to help fund the Department of Education, veterans' health care, and homeland security programs.

Under this administration's budget, the picture only gets worse for American taxpayers. By 2014, the GAO says that more than two-thirds of revenues will be required just to pay the interest on our debt. Under this projection, net interest would become the largest Federal spending program, larger than Social Security, larger than our defense budget, and larger than Medicare and Medicaid combined. This defies commonsense and is not in line with our national priorities.

An approach that faces this troubling reality is long overdue, and in the first 100 days of this Congress, we have proved that we are up to the challenge. We passed bills, Mr. Speaker, that benefit small businesses, and above all, we passed a responsible budget. It funds our top priorities, like strengthening our military and our homeland security. This is commonsense and this is what the Blue Dogs stand for. We want to make a difference by requiring and demanding fiscal responsibility.

This also does something very important. It restores fiscal discipline and returns us to surplus by 2012.

Mr. Speaker, as American taxpayers, we send our hard-earned money to the IRS. They should know where it is going. Today, too much of it is going towards paying interest on our national debt. With fiscal responsibility and cost accountability in place, this Congress can change what is going on and bring real relief to America's working families.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Ohio for his work within the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition in trying to restore commonsense and fiscal discipline to our national government, trying to give us a budget that will return us to the days of record surpluses instead of record deficits. Hopefully, as a result of the budget passed on this floor just in the last week, we will see this number start back down once again, because it is important; it is important that we put an end to deficit spending.

One of the ways we do that is through accountability. Let me just say that if we are going to ask the American people to get up and go to work and pay taxes, we as a Congress should be held accountable and the various Federal agencies should be held

accountable to ensure they are getting the most value for their tax dollars, that we truly are doing things that will honor their work and ensure that we leave this country just a little bit better than we found it for our children and our grandchildren.

□ 2045

One of the leaders in the Blue Dog Coalition, in fact, one of the founders of the Blue Dog Coalition that has done a lot in the area of accountability is the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. TANNER), and at this time, I will yield to the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. TANNER). Thank you for joining me this evening.

Mr. TANNER. Mr. Speaker, well, thank you very much.

I wanted to come tonight and join with my colleague, Mr. ROSS. I heard what you have been saying and I wish this was not true, but all one has to do is go to the Web site of the U.S. Treasury and see for one's self how much money has been borrowed in the last 60 months from foreign sources, and I heard you address that point earlier.

I want to talk about a bill that we introduced last Congress that the Blue Dogs endorsed and that we hope to introduce in the next few days in this Congress; and hopefully we can pass it this time.

It has to do with the subject of, the theme of tonight's Special Order with regard to accountability. And this is not a Democrat or Republican bill. A lot of times these Special Orders are utilized by people who want to come and blast the Democrats, if they are Republicans, or Democrats who want to blast the Republicans on the other side, and that is not what this floor is for. Politics should end here. We all represent people in this country in a public office and, therefore, all of us represent not political parties in our jobs here but citizens of this country.

This accountability bill that I want to talk about for just a few minutes, if I may, has to do with demanding that those whom we appropriate money to, any administration, Democrat, Republican, does not matter, actually manage the money so that we at least know where it goes. We may disagree as to how it is spent, but we at least, as public officials, ought to have the responsibility for ourselves and those whom we represent to understand and appreciate what it is going for.

We have here in Washington, the Congress has, an organization called the GAO, General Accountability Office. The GAO is charged with the responsibility, as a nonpolitical branch of the government, to audit, among other things, other responsibilities, audit the various Federal agencies to see what they are doing with the money that we remove from people's pockets involuntarily. And I heard you mention tax day earlier. Today is tax day. We remove the money involuntarily from the taxpayers, the citizens of this country, and then we appropriate to an administration, any administration.

Well, the GAO does audits as part of their responsibility, and they have reported to us that 18 of 24 Federal agencies could not produce an acceptable

audit in fiscal year 2005, which is the latest figures that we have.

Now, there is no private enterprise in America that could withstand that kind of either sloppy bookkeeping on the one hand, to be charitable about it, sloppy bookkeeping, or out-and-out negligence, incompetence, fraud, whatever one wishes to call it. Eighteen of 24 could not do that.

So last year, we, the Blue Dogs, designed a bill that said when that happens, when the Inspector General of any department or the GAO identifies any element or any agency of the Federal Government that cannot tell us what they did with the money that we removed from people involuntarily in the form of taxation and appropriated to them, this bill would provide that within 60 days Congress must, by law, hold a hearing to determine why it is they cannot account for the money that was appropriated to them or, in the alternative, if they cannot account for it, then it is simple: They do not get it.

That makes eminent sense to me as a businessperson at home in Tennessee. I cannot imagine going to the comptroller or the treasurer of our business and saying, here is an expenditure of X amount of dollars, what did you do with it, and they would respond, I do not know, I cannot tell you what happened to that. That would not be acceptable in any private enterprise in this country, and it should not be acceptable here in the public domain because it is all of our moneys that we are talking about, 18 of 24.

The other aspect of this bill is, in government talk, when the GAO identifies a high-risk program, what they mean is the program is being mismanaged, number one; or two, it is not doing what Congress intended it to do when the law was passed. Pretty simple. It is either the program is not working or they cannot tell us what they did with the money. In either event, Congress ought to hold a public hearing so the people of this country know that this program is either not working or that it is being so badly mismanaged, by again any administration, that we need to stop the spending.

I hope as we move through this Congress that we will be able to actually enhance and improve on it; not only that, but actually pass it into law. It needs to be done. It has everything to do with the trust that the American people have placed in us when they voted for us to come here to this arena to transact their business on their behalf.

One of the things I like so much about the Blue Dogs is that we have this quaint belief that the voting card that all of us possess as Members of Congress belongs not to either party leadership but to the people who hired us. That is, I believe, what the Founding Fathers had in mind when they created the People's House.

And so, therefore, when we have all this talk about partisan politics here,

it really has nothing to do with the philosophy of the Blue Dogs in that we believe we ought to work for the people that hired us, and that is the people in our respective districts who have every right to expect that when we come here. We will not only be guardians of the country in terms of funding what is necessary for national defense, and we are very strong on that, as you know, but we also will try as best we can individually and collectively as a body to see that the moneys that are being spent are being spent in the best possible way.

I gave a talk at home over the Easter recess, and I told them, I said there are two things that are being witnessed here by this unbelievable not only spending spree, but borrowing spree that has gone on around here for the last 60 months. We have transferred so much of our Nation's treasure to interest, for which we get nothing, that we are degrading basically the tax base to the point where I am afraid in the future our country will not be able to make the two investments that I believe are necessary for our Nation's security.

One is in the area of infrastructure. One only need go to any country on the planet where there is no infrastructure, no highways, roads, bridges, water, sewer, all of the things that private enterprise in this country can build around to create the economic opportunity, the jobs, to create the commerce that will result in further tax receipts for more investment, whether it be for water and sewer and highways, airports, bridges, roads, tunnels, anything like that, to see that the government must make those investments so that private enterprise can prosper.

Nobody is prospering in these countries. We call them Third World countries, but they are nonetheless countries where there is no infrastructure. Nobody is doing any good because there is nothing to build around to create the economic activity, the commerce that must go on to make things happen. And so we are degrading our tax base by this interest that we are now paying, for which we get nothing.

The second thing is human capital. From my reading of history, there is no country in the history of civilization and mankind, or humankind, that has been able to maintain itself as a strong and free country with an unhealthy, uneducated population. We are beginning to see the budget being cut in areas where, number one, we have to have public education because all of us, as American citizens, are charged with the responsibility not only for ourselves and our families, but we are charged with making decisions for our cities, counties, State and country. Without public education for the literally millions of kids who may not get that in their homes, because of various economic factors and otherwise, we have to educate our citizens. Thomas Jefferson said it as well as anybody.

The other thing is health care. We are going to be taking up SCHIP, it is called, which is basically children's health insurance. We cannot afford in this country, in my view, to leave it better than when we found it with unhealthy, uneducated children, and so what we are trying to do is stop this ever-increasing encroachment on the tax base of interest so that we are rendered unable as citizens to do the things necessary to keep our country competitive in an increasingly globalized world. This is not just a hope. It is a necessity, in my view, that we be able to do that.

So, as we talk about fiscal responsibility, we talk about this unbelievable borrowing that is taking place, what we are really talking about is balancing the budget, not for the sake of balancing the budget, but for the sake of stopping an ever-increasing encroachment on the tax base for which we get nothing.

Last year, this country sent overseas \$145 billion thereabouts. That is almost seven times as much as the so-called foreign aid bill. I do not particularly like the way we do that, but at least one can make some strategic decisions about money that is being appropriated in the foreign aid bill in terms of whether or not it will advance the interests of the United States in a given part of the world. Interest checks, on the other hand, just go to whoever bought our debt. That is a huge difference, and it is one I hope that people will relate to, understand, appreciate and hold dear when they make the decisions that they make with regard to who ought to be running our United States Congress.

Again, this bill basically does not address who controls the Congress or who controls the White House. It simply says that all of us who come here as public servants ought to have that kind of responsibility to oversee and to look after the moneys that are removed from people's pockets involuntarily in the form of taxation and appropriated to any administration.

□ 2100

I think, and I am glad that the Blue Dogs share that philosophy and share that opinion, because oftentimes, all you hear coming from these microphones is, well, the Republicans are worse than the Democrats, the Democrats are worse than the Republicans, and they did it to us, so we will do it to them. That is not getting us anywhere.

We have much more serious matters to discuss, and we ought to be talking about it in this Special Order. Tonight is one opportunity. I want to thank you again for allowing me this time to talk about these, I think, critical matters that affect us all. There is no Democrat or Republican; we are all Americans.

As Americans, we are not doing what we ought to do to do the things that I heard ALLEN BOYD talk about awhile

ago about what our parents taught us: one, live within your means; two, pay your debts; three, invest in the future. Unfortunately, we haven't been doing any of those, and it's going to catch up with us at some point if we don't reverse it.

We are trying, we need help doing it, but we are going to keep plugging away at it.

I am very proud of this Special Order that you put together. I am actually really proud of the work that the Blue Dogs are doing.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Tennessee for his insight and his leadership on the accountability bill to restore accountability to our national government.

Did the gentleman, I just want to make sure I understood the gentleman correctly, did the gentleman indicate that 18 of 24 major Federal agencies can't produce a clean audit of its books?

Mr. TANNER. That is according to the GAO. There were six that were compliant with the Federal management, financial management law. Commerce, Labor, the EPA, the National Science Foundation, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Social Security Administration.

The ones who were not were Agriculture, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Interior, State, Transportation, Treasury, Veterans Affairs, Agency for International Development, General Services Administration, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Small Business Administration.

There may be valid reasons why they could not tell us what they did, but we ought to have a hearing and find out what those reasons are. If they need help to correct it, and legislation to do so, then we at least would know that; and we could begin to work on that to try to correct this problem.

But to ignore it is, in my judgment, an act of irresponsibility by the Congress and by the administration.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman for his work on accountability within our government, Mr. TANNER from Tennessee, one of the founders of the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition. Thank you for your leadership. Thank you for joining us on the floor this evening to talk about restoring common sense, accountability, and fiscal discipline to our national government.

Madam Speaker, as you walk the Halls of Congress, again, it's easy to know when you are walking by the office of a fellow Blue Dog member, because you will see this poster reminding the American people, reminding the Members of the Congress that today the U.S. national debt is \$8,887,793,986,597 and some change. For every man, woman and child in America, their share, your share, of the national debt is \$29,465.

Also, if you have any questions, comments on our Special Order this evening, I would encourage you to e-mail us at BlueDog@mail.house.gov. That is BlueDog@mail.house.gov.

This is a Special Order being hosted by the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition talking about issues that we believe are important to the future of this country.

I am delighted to be joined this evening by a new member of the Blue Dog Coalition from the State of Indiana (Mr. ELLSWORTH).

Mr. ELLSWORTH. Madam Speaker, I had not intended to address the House, the people's House tonight. But as I sat in the chair you sit in just a few minutes ago, I looked out and listened to the other Members and reflected on why I was sent here just 90 days ago, or a little longer, and thought that it was my duty to come down and talk.

As I heard Mr. BOYD from Florida address the group and talk about the way he was raised in Florida, it was very similar to the way Mr. ROSS was raised in Arkansas and the way I was raised in Indiana. It reminds me of a story that I told a few times and PAYGO comes to mind.

I can remember when I was very young, probably in the 10-year-old range, having my eye on a Sting-Ray bicycle at Sears and Roebuck in Evansville, Indiana, at the Washington Square Mall. Those back home will know what I am talking about. It was a purple Sting-Ray, metal flake seat. I think they called it a banana seat, if I remember it correctly. It had a sissy bar on the back and high-rise handlebars.

For anybody in that age group, you will remember what I am talking about. I can vividly remember that the price tag was \$55 for that bicycle. I remember going home and asking my parents if I could have that bicycle. They said, sure, when you save the \$55, knock yourself out, you can go down and do that.

I cut grass, and I delivered papers with my brother, and I had odd jobs until I saved the \$55 and was able to go down to Sears and purchase that bike. That's the way you did it back then. You saved your money. You paid as you went. That's the way you purchased things.

That lesson stayed with me to this day. I am proud to display that poster outside my hall, outside my office in the Cannon Building.

But it's also a stark reminder, when we are talking about trillions of dollars of debt, that every Member of this country, every man, woman and child, that their part of the national debt is \$29,465, is a stark reminder of the work we have to do.

When I was asking people to hire me for this job, I can remember a couple of things they told me they wanted before they would send me here that they wanted me to guarantee them, that I would be honest, and I would be fair, and I would be fiscally conservative.

When I started looking at the Congress, and groups to associate yourself with, it became very easy when I found out about the Blue Dog Coalition, the fiscally conservative group of Members, 43 strong now, that said we have got to bring this place back to order. I can remember a gentleman in Evansville, Scott Saxe, a gentleman I used to work out with at the Fitness Zone in Evansville. He said, you know, I am a Republican, but this has gotten ridiculous, the way our country spends. He says, we have got to stop this insanity.

That is why I applied for this job, so I could come be a part of that. People come in my office every day, and good people. I call them do-gooders, because they are good people doing good things. They are looking for that Federal help that we can give them.

But we can't give it unless we have that money; we save it in the areas we can save. It's tough, because you know these people are out helping folks every day. You want to give, because that's the way America is. We give to people that are doing good, but it's tough, because we have got to make tough decisions.

But in the 3 months that I have been here, now going on 4, I see examples every day of ways that we can cut the waste, fraud and abuse, the things that we are doing that the American people, when they hear about it in the Eighth District of Indiana, they get really upset, and they should, and that is why I am here.

Just a few examples: when we send contractors, no matter how you feel about the war in the Middle East, but when we send our contractors over on our dime, and they sit 9 months and never lift a finger on the contracts they are hired for, that is money wasted that we could give, put to something else, education, to help people help people.

When we have pallets of money that are lost, pallets, skid loads of \$100 bills that are lost, and we can't find them? That is not why they sent me to Congress. That is not what they expect us to do, to lose millions of dollars on pallets in the Middle East.

No-bid contracts, we have all heard about those. Companies would be getting Federal contracts that aren't paying their Federal taxes. I don't think people mind paying taxes. They will talk about it. But when they drive on I-70 through Terre Haute, or I-64 through the northern part of Vanderburgh County or I-164, they appreciate those roads.

When the FBI or Federal law enforcement agency does something good for them or the Border Patrol keeps their borders safe, they don't mind paying taxes for that. But when they are getting ripped off or losing money and are doing no-bid contracts, and we have companies being awarded Federal contracts and not paying their Federal taxes, is just plain wrong. It's not why they sent me here. It's not why they sent any of us here, and they want us to stop.

Single-source contracts, let's take, for example, our military plants, and there are two companies that make the engines, but we award to one single source. It's wrong. Competition is healthy; we need to do it. It's why I am proud to join the Blue Dog Coalition. This Congress, both sides of the aisle, needs to work together to bring some sense, some common sense and fiscal accountability back to these Halls so that we can go back to our districts, proud, Republicans and Democrats alike, saying we are spending your money wisely, we are spending it honestly and fiscally and conservatively.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Indiana, a new member of the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition for joining me this evening and being a part of this discussion on how we restore common sense, fiscal discipline, and accountability to our government.

Mr. TANNER said it very well earlier in the evening when he said the American people are sick and tired of all the partisan bickering that goes on at our Nation's Capitol. I can tell you those of us in the Blue Dog Coalition, we don't care if it is our idea or the Republican idea. We are looking for commonsense ideas, ideas that promote accountability, ideas that make sense for the people back home.

Now, there are others that will come to this floor and talk about the Democrats being bad on this or so forth and so on, and there are Democrats that will talk about the Republicans being bad on this or so forth and so on, but the American people are sick of that. The American people get it. They recognize that we are all Americans first and we are in this together.

Talking about accountability, this is a bipartisan issue that I would like to raise in the closing minutes of this Special Order. The United States is spending about \$9 billion a month in Iraq, which translates to about \$275 million a day or \$12 million an hour. However, even with all of this spending, many believe that the U.S. Army is not providing our troops with the most technologically advanced and effective body armor available.

If you ask 100 different people what they think about this post-war Iraq policy, you get about 100 different answers. But I can tell you that there is one thing that all of us, Democrat and Republican, should remain united on, and that is funding and supporting and properly equipping our men and women in uniform. This war has affected all of us. My brother-in-law is in the United States Air Force. He is in the Middle East region this evening.

Let me tell you that 2 weeks ago, one of my constituents, Mr. John Grant of Hot Springs, Arkansas, brought this issue to my attention. Mr. Grant has become an expert on the types of body armor that are currently available in the market due to the fact that his youngest son serves in the Army National Guard's 39th Infantry Brigade. Arkansas' 39th was recently informed

that they could be deployed to Iraq by the end of the year. It will be their second deployment. I was there in Baghdad visiting them August 11, 2004, on their previous deployment, soldiers from my hometown, soldiers from throughout my district, people that I used to teach in Sunday school and people that, well, I have duck hunted with.

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And they will be returning again, perhaps by the end of the year, and I believe that we owe it to this soldier, his family, and all soldiers and their families, to ensure that our troops are given the finest armor and equipment available.

This issue specifically involves the U.S. Army's recent testing and comparison of Pinnacle Armor's so-called Dragon Skin body armor and the Interceptor Body Armor, often referred to as IBA, currently in use by the Armed Forces. Because of equipment shortages in 2005, some troops purchased equipment at their own expense, including body armor, and Congress enacted legislation to reimburse these soldiers. However, months later, the Army issued a "safety of use message," which instructed all commanders to ensure that only IBA brand is used by soldiers, prohibiting the use of any other body armor.

The Army's "safety of use message" also dispelled recent reports that Dragon Skin was superior to the IBA, citing that Dragon Skin has failed various tests and therefore does not meet the Army's requirements for soldier body armor protection.

Military support organizations, such as Soldiers for the Truth, of which Mr. Grant is a member, along with Dragon Skin manufacturer Pinnacle Armor, argue that Dragon Skin did not fail any test. They have stated that the testing was biased, and they continue to stand behind their assertions that Dragon Skin is superior to the IBA.

They point out that Dragon Skin has also been approved and is used by the U.S. Air Force, the CIA, the NSA, the U.S. Department of Energy officials in Iraq, the U.S. Secret Service Presidential Protection detail, some Special Forces units, and various police departments and SWAT teams around the Nation. However, our troops cannot purchase or use this body armor. I have even been informed that, as a result of this message, if a soldier purchases and uses any armor other than the IBA, this action will be construed as though the soldier has disobeyed a direct order and could, could, jeopardize his or her family receiving service group life insurance if killed in combat.

It is not certain whether this is true, but if it is, I completely disagree with this policy and believe that our combat soldiers should not be denied the use of the latest and most effective body armor if it will result in the preservation of their lives.

Therefore, for the protection of our troops, I am calling for a full investiga-

tion into whether the U.S. Army is using the most effective body armor for our troops' protection. We need an unbiased external investigation to determine whether the IBA is the most effective armor available. And if additional testing reveals that Dragon Skin body armor or any other brand is the superior product, then it should be provided to our troops.

I am extremely grateful to Mr. Grant for bringing this issue to my attention, as there is no greater obligation we have to our troops, who risk their lives on a daily basis, than to supply them with the most advanced technology and resources available.

I believe that we must demand that the most stringent test possible be conducted to resolve whether our troops are being given access to the absolute best body armor available. What might have been good in 2003 might very well be outdated today. My only goal is to protect our troops in harm's way by ensuring that they receive the most advanced body armor on the market today as they carry out their mission.

May God bless our country, may God bless and keep our soldiers safe.

THE OFFICIAL TRUTH SQUAD

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. CASTOR). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Madam Speaker, thank you so very much.

Before I begin, I do want to just say that our hearts, our thoughts, and our prayers are with all at Virginia Tech and in Blacksburg, Virginia, today. As you know, Madam Speaker, an unspeakable horror visited their campus, and it is absolutely impossible for any of us to know what those who were directly connected to it are going through. We were so incredibly heartened by their convocation today as we watched it, and we noted that Hokie spirit is effervescent and incredibly supportive. We are all with the Hokie Nation today. We wish them the best and know that they are comforted by each other and by God's amazing grace.

Madam Speaker, it is a great privilege for me to come to the floor again this evening. I want to thank the leadership for the opportunity to share some comments and to discuss an issue that our friends just finished talking about a little bit.

This is a remarkable day every year. Madam Speaker, as you know, today is once again the day when Americans reach deep into their pockets and they pay Uncle Sam. Many Americans may be filling out their tax forms right now, or they have just finished slogging through the maze of the Tax Code jargon and crunching numbers and filling out form after form after form. And today, Americans all across this Nation will once again trust Washington with their money, because today is tax